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SUBJECT: 'ABD AL-MAHDI ADVISOR SEES UIA GETTING 110-120 SEATS, BUT PRIME MINISTERIAL RACE IS CLOUDY

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford, reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

[11](#). (S) Summary. Vice President 'Adil 'Abd al-Mahdi adviser Fareed Yasseen opined that the UIA would get 110-120 seats in the December 15 election. He hoped 'Abd al-Mahdi would emerge as the UIA nominee for Prime Minister, but acknowledged PM Ja'fari's stubbornness, and could not describe a scenario in which 'Abd al-Mahdi was likely to emerge as the UIA nominee. End summary.

[12](#). (C) Vice President 'Adil 'Abd al-Mahdi adviser Fareed Yasseen, formerly director of Policy Planning in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and previously privatization adviser to Iraqi Governing Council member Adnan Pachachi, told Poloffs on December 11 that it was his assessment that the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) would get 110-120 seats, the Kurds 50-60 seats, the Sunni religious parties 50-60 seats, the Sunni secular parties about 10 seats, Allawi's National List 20-30 seats, and other small parties 10-15 seats.

[13](#). (S) When asked how 'Abd al-Mahdi might become Prime Minister, however, Yasseen became far less precise. Yasseen acknowledged PM Ja'fari's stubbornness and desire for the job, but thought Ja'fari had failed as Prime Minister. Yasseen's longtime personal friend Dr. Husayn Shahrastani also wants the job, but did not have anywhere near as much support as 'Abd al-Mahdi or Ja'fari. Yasseen criticized the UIA's archrival Ayad Allawi by claiming surprise that Allawi had not developed a crushing campaign based on the failures of the Ja'fari government. Poloffs speculated that Da'wa might unite behind Ja'fari, Sadr align with Ja'fari, and Fadhillah members vote as Sadr supporters do, bringing Ja'fari perhaps 70 votes within the UIA, an outright majority. Poloffs asked how 'Abd al-Mahdi could become the UIA nominee for Prime Minister then. After a pause, Yasseen quipped "prayer." He then said that he hoped the flaw in these assumption was that Da'wa would not support Ja'fari for Prime Minister. If Ja'fari was not supported by Da'wa, he reasoned the field would be open for 'Abd al-Mahdi to become the UIA's PM nominee. He also said Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani might step in and intervene on 'Abd al-Mahdi's behalf. (Note: He cited no evidence to support this idea. End note.) He also said the Kurds might try to block Ja'fari, but acknowledges that the Kurds are not likely to have the 92 votes by themselves to block Ja'fari.

[14](#). (C) Yasseen anticipated that the decisionmaking process for the cabinet would be different from the process earlier this year. He said that the Prime Minister-designate should have a significant say in who the ministers would be, because the PM would be responsible for his government. He anticipated a push-and-pull between having politicians in the cabinet and technocrats in the cabinet. A technocrat himself, he favors having relatively more technocrats, especially for the key service ministries.

[15](#). (S) COMMENT. Yasseen acknowledges he is not a SCIRI insider. While his loyalties are to 'Abd al-Mahdi (and to a lesser extent to Pachachi, whom Yasseen described as his mentor in Iraqi politics) it is noteworthy that he could not identify a strategy how 'Abd al-Mahdi plans on winning the UIA inside game to be the UIA nominee for Prime Minister. By contrast, much of the convention wisdom in Baghdad is that 'Abd al-Mahdi would be the UIA candidate for Prime Minister. END COMMENT
KHALILZAD